

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-07

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 EUR-08 IO-06 SAA-01 SSM-01
NSC-05 INR-05 CIAE-00 PA-01 PM-03 DODE-00 ICA-01
OMB-01 TRSE-00 /054 W
-----046535 160930Z /15

R 141735Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4192
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION SINAI
USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 8954

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, IS
SUBJECT: BEGIN IS LOOKING BETTER

1. AFTER MONTHS OF NEAR PALL-BEARING BEGIN WATCHERS HAVE
DISCERNED A DECIDED IMPROVEMENT IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S
APPEARANCE IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS. HIS REBOUND SEEMED TO
BEGIN ABOUT JUNE 18 WHEN THE ISRAELI CABINET FINALLY DE-
CIDED ON ITS REPLIES TO THE TWO "AMERICAN QUESTIONS." IT
WAS WELL ALONG BY THE TIME THE VICE PRESIDENT'S VISIT,
DURING WHICH HE SEEMED TO GET STRONGER EVERY DAY. HAARETZ
RECENTLY REPORTED THAT MINISTERS WERE IMPRESSED BY THE RE-
LAXED, CONFIDENT MANNER BEGIN DISPLAYED AT THE JULY 9
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CABINET MEETING. HIS RECENT PHOTOGRAPHS AND INDICATIONS
HE IS TCKLING A FULLER SCHEDULE ALSO SUGGEST A MORE ROBUST
BEGIN. IN THE KNESSET JULY 12 WE HEARD CON-
FIRMATION OF THIS NEW VITALITY. THIS WEEK BEGIN SUDDENLY
TOOK CHARGE OF THE TWO WEEK OLD SEARCH FOR A COMPROMISE
ON EXEMPTING RELIGIOUS GIRLS FROM CONSCRIPTION AND QUICKLY
PRODUCED AN ACCEPTABLE IF SOLOMONIC FORMULA. AS NRP MK

YEHUDA BEN-MEIR PUT IT, "WE'RE BACK TO THE OLD BEGIN AGAIN."

2. WHILE BEN-MEIR'S OBSERVATION MAY BE GILDING THE LILY SOMEWHAT, WE HAVE NOTICED A REMARKABLE RESURGENCE OF BEGIN'S PHYSICAL ENERGY AND WELL-BEING IN RECENT DAYS. THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRESENTATIONS DURING THE VICE PRESIDENT'S VISIT WERE MADE WITH VIGOR AND CLARITY. NOT, PERHAPS, QUITE LIKE THE OLD BEGIN BUT NEVERTHELESS A VASTLY IMPROVED PERFORMANCE AS COMPARED TO A MONTH AGO. THE DCM NOTES THAT BEGIN'S COLOR IS CONSIDERABLY IMPROVED AND HE IS MUCH LIVELIER IN PUBLIC. HIS VOICE IS STRONGER AND HIS HUMOR AND SMILE HAVE RETURNED. PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS WITH BEGIN'S PERSONAL STAFF CONFIRM THESE OBSERVATIONS. NONETHELESS, BEGIN STILL HAS THE APPEARANCE AND ACTIONS OF A MAN WHO DOES NOT FEEL HIS BEST. WE NOTE HE TENDS TO CLING TO THE PODIUM WHEN SPEAKING AND HIS GAIT IS CLOSE TO A SHUFFLE. MRS. BEGIN CONFIRMED TO THE DCM'S WIFE YESTERDAY THAT SHE REMAINS VERY CONCERNED ABOUT THE STATE OF HER HUSBAND'S HEALTH. SHE SAID, UNDER HER CAJOLING, HE HAD RELUCTANTLY AGREED TO TAKE A TWO-WEEKS REST (IN ISRAEL) BEGINNING O/A AUGUST 2.

3. DURING TWO RECENT MEETING THE AMBASSADOR HAS FOUND BEGIN ALERT, RELAXED, SELF-CONFIDENT, AND INTELLECTUALLY SHARP. HIS COLOR WAS GOOD AND HE SEEMED BACK TO THE INTELLECTUAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL NORM WHICH WAS CHARACTERISTIC UNTIL FEBRUARY, WHEN HIS CONDITION WENT INTO A PROLONGED DECLINE.
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LEWIS

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: HEALTH, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, HEAD OF GOVERNMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 14 jul 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978TELAV08954
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780291-1224
Format: TEL
From: TEL AVIV
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780758/aaaabwnm.tel
Line Count: 95
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 97dd0773-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2000041
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BEGIN IS LOOKING BETTER
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, IS, (BEGIN, MENACHEM)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/97dd0773-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014